

VISUAL ART FORMS OF MEDIEVAL INDIA

COMPENDIUM OF NATIONAL SEMINAR PAPERS



Editor

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16.	GEOMETRY AND AESTHETICS IN INDIAN ARCHITECTURE K. Dakshinamoorthy, Sthapati	69
17.	ROLE OF VISUAL LITERATURE ON THE TEMPLE ART K.N. Sundareswara Rao	73
18.	MIRRORING THE SPLENDOUR OF INDIAN MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE : A STUDY OF SELECT POEMS IN TELUGU LITERATURE Dr. N. Eswar Reddy, Dr. P. Padma	77
19.	ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH VISUAL ART – A STUDY OF MUGHAL PAINTINGS T. Shyam Swaroop, K. Swapna Kumari	81
20.	THE SALIENT FEATURES OF SOUTH INDIAN PAINTINGS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHOLA PAINTINGS Dr. J. Soundararajan	86
21.	THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF VIJAYANAGARA, THE CAPITAL CITY OF VIJAYANAGARA RULERS BALAGONDA GANGADHAR	97
22.	SCULPTURAL REPRESENTATION OF GANESH IMAGES IN JHARKHAND : A STUDY Dr. Rajendra Dehuri, K. Rama Krishna Reddy	101
23.	ART-ITS SOCIAL RELEVANCE C. V. Viswanatha Rao	105
24.	ART AND BEAUTY AS REFLECTED IN ANAND COOMORSWAMY'S THE DANCE OF SHIVA Dr. R. V. Jayanth Kasyap	109
25.	MUGHAL ARCHITECTURE DURING AKBAR PERIOD M. Ramesh	112
26.	TEMPLES OF MEDIEVAL PERIOD OF YSR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH : GEOLOGICAL ASPECTS INFLUENCING THEIR PRESERVATION Dr. K. Raghu Babu	115
27.	SOUTH INDIAN MURALS Padankandla Srinivasa Rao	118
28.	SUBLIME IN MEDIEVAL INDIAN ART: ETERNAL REALISM BEYOND ABSTRACTION & REPRESENTATION RAMESH KANDAGIRI	123
29.	INFLUENCE OF ISLAM ON INDIAN ARCHITECTURAL STYLES Dr. Pameela Margaret	128
30.	VISUAL ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL PAINTINGS OF INDIA- A STUDY ON KALAMKARI OF SRIKALAHASTI Y. Manohara Rao, Dr. G. Pameela	131
31.	ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF VIJAYANAGARA DYNASTY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ANDHRA PRADESH Santosh Kumar Pedagadi, Tummaluru Suresh Babu	135

SUBLIME IN MEDIEVAL INDIAN ART: ETERNAL REALISM BEYOND ABSTRACTION & REPRESENTATION

RAMESH KANDAGIRI

New Delhi

"True happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organized its expressive motives and movements. A civilization must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, ways of living work to bring that harmony out, manage its rhythmic play and secure its continuance or the development of its motives. A civilization in pursuit of this aim may be predominantly material like modern European culture, predominantly mental and intellectual like the old Greco-Roman or predominantly spiritual like the still persistent culture of India. India's central conception is that of the eternal, the spirit here encased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas, and realm of conscious morality, dharma" - Shri Aurobindo

If we remove *abstraction* and *distortion* from 20th century exuberant European Modernism then what rules the globe as world art today and even the entire process of its evolution becomes unimaginable. For what geared up modernism in 20th century Europe has certainly to do with their culture's perennial search for the experience of elevated and liberated ethos of the *sublime*, which has been doubted and regimented for so long

by their successive ancestral mentors, the rationalist philosophers, that finally had to denounce what it once propounded with advocacy as strict discipline in expression of art that is in Greek's sense, *realism* or in Harold Rosenberg's sense, *idealism*. Although meaning of *realism* in art has been undergoing shifting intellectual justifications down the ages yet understanding of *realism* in the wisdom of Asian cultural core is strangely far from change. Reason for seemingly strange this undeterred understanding of Eternal Realism through the vacuum of *sublime* is actually deep-rooted in Indian central conception that from the time immemorial has been inbuilt through the contemplative experiments towards 'gnostic knowing' (knowing the unknown) through *Dhyaana* (meditation for enlightenment), *Yoga* (nerves' stretching postures for attaining harmony between spirit, body & mind), *Tantra* (esoteric practice using body as instrument), *Mantra* (esoteric practice using mind as instrument) and *Yantra* (occult diagram & machinery used as instrument in association with both *tantra* and *mantra*). All these practices required a certain degree of inward progression of the self and concentric contemplation while keeping spontaneous harmony with the law of Nature.

The basic difference between European and Indian approaches is that the former searched outward and the latter searched inward in order to 'know' the world. Medieval Indian Art too has been the